



Biodefense solutions to protect our nation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 19, 2008

CONTACT: Caree Vander Linden
(301) 619-2285
Caree.Vander-Linden@amedd.army.mil

USAMRIID Scientist Leonard A. Smith Selected for Unique Leadership Position

Leonard A. Smith, Ph.D., a world renowned scientist at the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID), has been selected to fill one of just 42 elite positions in the U.S. Army. He is the Institute's newest "ST," a designation given to scientists and engineers who combine world-class technical expertise with demonstrated scientific leadership. An ST position is equivalent to a civilian Senior Executive Service (SES) position or the military rank of Brigadier General.

Dr. Smith attended Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., where he received his Ph.D. degree in Biochemistry in 1978. He received a BA degree in Chemistry and Zoology from the University of New Hampshire in 1972. He joined USAMRIID as a research chemist in 1982, having served in private industry and as a senior staff fellow at the National Cancer Institute.

Dr. Smith currently heads the Department of Molecular Biology in the Division of Integrated Toxicology. Over the past several years, he and his staff have developed five recombinant vaccines against five separate serotypes of botulinum neurotoxin, and have transitioned these vaccine candidates to the advanced developer. The team also has developed a recombinant vaccine for ricin (a plant-based toxin) and has entered into an agreement for further development of the product.

"I was honored—and humbled—when I heard the news," said Dr. Smith, adding that because a year had elapsed since he applied for the position, he assumed it had gone to someone else. "I was at home one evening cooking dinner when the phone rang," he recalls. "It was the personnel office at the Pentagon, calling to offer me the job."

Dr. Smith says he was "in the right place at the right time," and credits his success to his "incredibly talented and hardworking staff" at USAMRIID, some of whom have worked with him for 25 years. He also thanked Colonel George W. Korch, Jr., USAMRIID's commander, and Lieutenant Colonel Andrea M. Stahl, chief of the Integrated Toxicology Division, for their support.

Dr. Smith and his team are currently focused on translational medicine—developing vaccines and human compatible monoclonal antibodies and guiding them from concept and discovery, through early development, non-clinical and preclinical testing, to production of clinical grade drug substance, and finally into human testing. Recent research efforts include discovering and developing small-molecule therapeutic drugs against biological agents of military importance.

“Len has been a crucial leader in the development of vaccine approaches for botulinum and ricin,” said Colonel Korch. “He has worked steadily over the years with a variety of other highly talented USAMRIID scientist and extramural collaborators to achieve successes in transitioning these vaccines into the clinic. His accomplishments are many—and the Army has recognized this fact through this appointment.”

Dr. Smith says his challenge will be to step into his new role while still keeping a hand in the research program.

“I’m still developing a transition plan,” Dr. Smith says. “The ST position is designed to allow for more research—I hope that will be the case. The position has already opened doors for me and I think it will continue to do so.”

According to Dr. James McCauley from the Army Research Laboratory, who is chairman of the Army ST organization, the people in ST positions not only are world-class experts in a variety of technical fields—they are charged with the responsibility of being strong advocates for the effectiveness of the entire Army Science and Technology program.

This involves providing technical leadership and counsel to the Army and the Department of Defense; improving the technical skills of Army scientists; advocating for high standards of scholarship, ethics and quality of research; and being actively engaged in scientific mentoring, nurturing and recruitment. The ST role also includes involvement in the Small Business Innovative Research program, the Army Science Conference, the Army Research and Development Awards Program, and the In-House Laboratory Independent Research program.

Dr. Smith has authored or co-authored more than 100 scientific publications, reviews and book chapters, and holds several patents for his work. He is frequently invited to lecture at national and international meetings. He is an active member of the International Society on Toxinology, American Society for Microbiology, American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists and PDA: An International Association for Pharmaceutical Science and Technology.

Dr. Smith is also the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the 2007 Joel M. Dalrymple Award from the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States and the 2007 Research Scientist of the Year Award from the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. He was a finalist in the 2007 Service to America Awards, and was elected to the faculty of the Neurotoxin Institute in New York City in 2007. He received the Order of Military Medical Merit award in 2006 and the Army Research and Development Achievement Award in 1999.

USAMRIID, located at Fort Detrick, Maryland, is the lead medical research laboratory for the U.S. Department of Defense Biological Defense Research Program, and plays a key role in national defense and in infectious disease research. The Institute conducts basic and applied research on biological threats resulting in medical solutions (such as vaccines, drugs and diagnostics) to protect the warfighter. While USAMRIID’s primary mission is focused on the military, its research often has applications that benefit society as a whole. USAMRIID is a subordinate laboratory of the U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command. For more information, visit www.usamriid.army.mil

###